BUILDING TRUST

A STUDENT-FACULTY COLLABORATION KIT

TOGETHER

So nice to meet you!

This workbook comes from student experise, led by Joshua Cedeno, Nataly Gonzales, Yexayra Cabrera Martinez, and Mia Ramos through the PASS (Psychology Peer Academic Support System) program at John Jay. We have developed a workshop for faculty about what makes students feel seen, supported, and trusted in their courses. In this workshop we also highlight what makes us feel suspected, invisible, or set up to fail before we even walk through the door.

We know you care about your students. This isn't about shaming anyone or adding more to your plate. It's about closing the gap between the care you feel and the care students actually experience. Sometimes that gap exists in small language choices, syllabus design, or policies written defensively because we're all exhausted and under-resourced. We created this workbook inspired by our workshop taught on December 9th, 2025 (with support from our faculty advisors, Dr. Emese Ilyés and Dr. Karla Batres) to offer concrete, manageable ways to make your care more visible.

We're grateful you're here. Thank you for taking student voices seriously.

Josh, Mia, Nataly, Yexayra

ABOUT PASS

PASS (Psychology Peer Academic Support System) is a student-led group in the psychology department at John Jay College that aims to address the needs of psychology students and foster a sense of belonging within the department. PASS is guided by participatory action research approaches and liberation psychology values and ethics. Beyond academic support and career advice, PASS prioritizes building connections between students, faculty, and the institution, creating spaces so students can bring themselves fully into the collective conversation and catalyze transformative changes on the macro and micro level.

SECTION 1: THE SYLLABUS AUDIT

"I ALREADY FEEL CARED FOR JUST FROM LOOKING AT IT." HOW WE FEEL LOOKING AT A THOUGHTFULLY DESIGNED SYLLABUS

YOUR SYLLABUS DOES EMOTIONAL WORK BEFORE YOU EVER MEET STUDENTS. WE'RE NOT HERE TO CRITICIZE WHAT YOU'VE CREATED. WE KNOW YOU CARE. THIS REFLECTION IS ABOUT MAKING SURE STUDENTS CAN FEEL THE CARE YOU ALREADY HAVE.

ACTIVITY 1: FIRST IMPRESSIONS MATTER

Time needed: 5 minutes

Grab your current syllabus. Don't open it yet.

Now answer honestly:

- If you received this document in your mailbox from your landlord, your insurance company, or the IRS, how would you feel?
- Would you want to read it, or would you skim it looking for bad news?

Now open it.

Circle or highlight the first thing a student's eye would land on. Is it:

☐ A policy or penalty?

☐ Your teaching philosophy or course vision?

☐ Required readings/assignments?

☐ Something about you as a person?
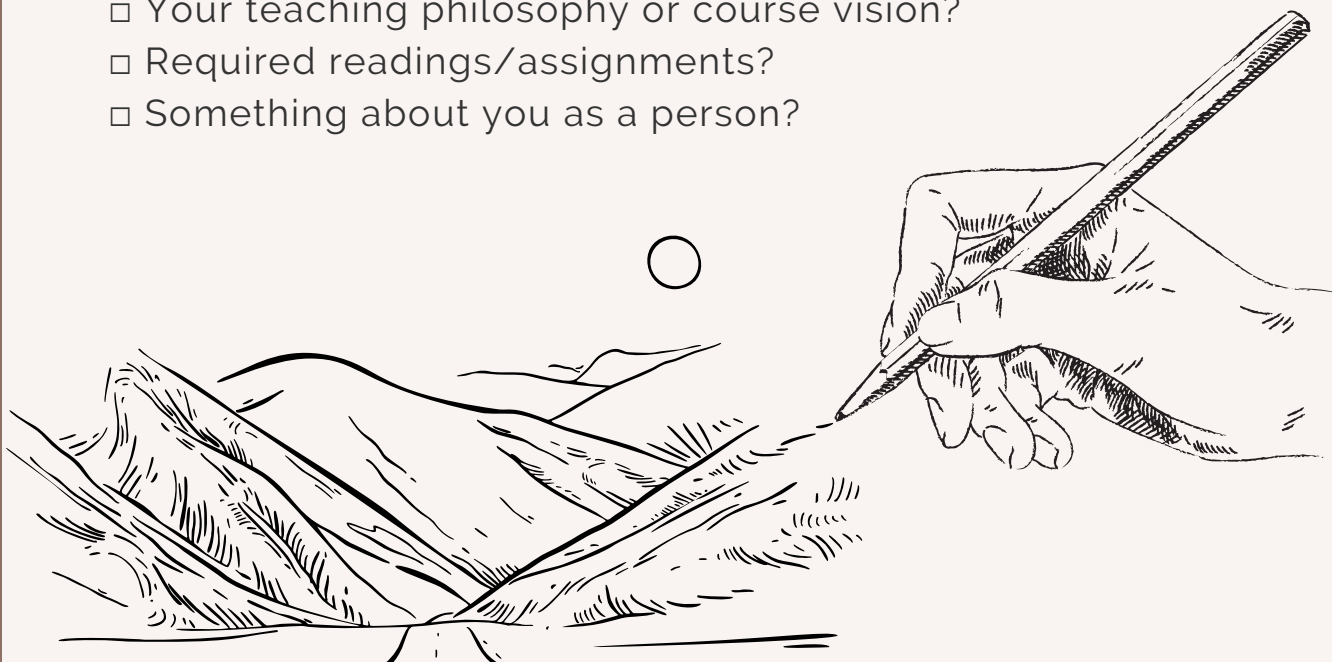
ACTIVITY 2: THE LANGUAGE AUDIT

Time needed: 10 minutes

Count your statements

Go through your first 4 pages. Tally:

"You" statements (talking TO students): _____
Examples: "You will learn..." "You are expected to..." "You must..."
"I/We" statements (talking WITH students): _____
 Examples: "I'm excited to explore..." "We'll work together on..." "I hope you'll..."

What's your ratio? If "you" dominates, your syllabus may feel like a lecture or list of demands rather than an invitation.

Find Your Personality

Where do students get to know you as a human?
Mark these moments with a ⭐:
- Do you share why you love teaching this topic?
- Do you mention your own learning journey or struggles?
- Do you acknowledge challenges students might face?
- Does your voice come through, or could this have been written by anyone?

TAKE THIS WITH YOU
BEFORE NEXT SEMESTER:
- REORGANIZE YOUR SYLLABUS SO COURSE CONTENT AND YOUR TEACHING VISION COME FIRST
- REWRITE AT LEAST 3 POLICY STATEMENTS CONVEYING THE SAME BOUNDARY WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING STUDENTS AS HUMANS WITH COMPLEX LIVES:
- ADD ONE PARAGRAPH THAT LETS STUDENTS KNOW YOU AS A PERSON)

SECTION 2: AI POLICIES THAT BUILD TRUST

"WHEN THE SYLLABUS SAYS 'AI USE WILL BE TREATED AS PLAGIARISM,' WHAT I HEAR IS: 'I ASSUME YOU'RE ALL PLANNING TO CHEAT.' IT MAKES ME NOT WANT TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT ANYTHING." WHAT OUR EXPERIENCES ARE RIGHT NOW.

AI LANGUAGE IS APPEARING IN SYLLABI, OFTEN EMBEDDED IN REQUIRED PLAGIARISM STATEMENTS. AND IT'S DOING DAMAGE. WE ARRIVE MOTIVATED AND HOPEFUL, AND ARE IMMEDIATELY MET WITH PREEMPTIVE ACCUSATIONS OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY. THIS DECREASES TRUST, EFFORT, AND WILLINGNESS TO SEEK HELP.

WE BELIEVE THERE IS A DIFFERENT WAY TO APPROACH THIS THAT MAY BUILD TRUST.

ACTIVITY 1: AUDIT YOUR AI LANGUAGE

Time needed: 5 minutes

If you have AI language in your syllabus or course materials, write it here exactly as it appears:

If you don't have AI language yet, write what you've been considering or what you've seen from colleagues:

Now read it through a student's eyes.

This language communicates:
□ I trust you to make good decisions about your learning
□ I assume you're looking for shortcuts
□ I'm interested in partnering with you to figure this out
□ I'm trying to catch you doing something wrong
□ I'm confused about AI too and we're navigating this together
□ I see AI as a threat to police, not a tool to understand

Time needed: 10 minutes

Most AI policies try to answer this question:

"How do I prevent cheating?"

But students in your classes respond better to a different question:

"How can I help students understand when AI serves their learning and when it short-circuits it?"

Think about your specific course. What cognitive work do you want students to develop?

In this course, I want students to build their capacity to:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Now ask yourself: When would AI actually prevent that cognitive work from happening?

AI would undermine this learning when:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

ACTIVITY 3: THE SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Time needed: 10 minutes

Here's what accusatory vs. learning-centered AI policies sound like:
❌ Suspicion-Based Approach
"Do not use ChatGPT or any AI tools. I will know if you do, and it will result in failure."

What this communicates to us as students:
- I don't trust you
- I'm surveilling your work
- I'm more interested in catching cheaters than supporting learners
- Don't come to me with questions

✅ Learning-Centered Approach
"Let's talk about AI and learning. AI tools can be useful for brainstorming, organizing thoughts, or getting unstuck. But they can also short-circuit the cognitive work that actually helps you develop critical thinking skills. In this class, I want you to build your capacity to analyze evidence and construct arguments. Here's when AI might help with that process, and here's when it would undermine it:
Times when AI might support your learning:
- Generating initial ideas when you're stuck
- Organizing your thoughts before drafting
- Getting feedback on structure
Times when AI would prevent your learning:
- Writing your analysis for you (you can't build analytical skills without practicing analysis)
- Replacing your engagement with course readings
- Doing the cognitive work that builds the capacities this course is designed to develop
If you're unsure whether using AI in a specific situation would help or hurt your learning, ask me. I'm genuinely interested in helping you navigate this."

What this communicates to us as students:
- I trust you to think critically about your own learning
- I'm interested in partnership, not policing
- The goal is your growth, not your compliance
- It's safe to ask questions

ACTIVITY 4: DRAFT YOUR LEARNING-CENTERED AI POLICY

Use this template to draft AI language for your course. Customize it for your specific class and learning goals.

In this class, my goal is for you to develop:

_____

....

....

....

AI tools can sometimes support that learning, and sometimes short-circuit it. Here's how to think about the difference:

✓ Times when AI might support your learning in this course:

_____

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_____

✗ Times when AI would prevent your learning in this course:

_____

....

....

....

If you're unsure whether using AI would help or hurt your learning in a specific situation, please ask me. I'm genuinely interested in helping you navigate this thoughtfully.

ACTIVITY 6: CREATING ONGOING CONVERSATION

Time needed: 5 minutes

A policy in your syllabus is just the beginning. How will you keep the conversation going?

Check the strategies you're willing to try:

☐ Discuss AI explicitly in class during the first week
☐ Share an example of when you used AI effectively (and when you didn't)
☐ Invite students to share their questions or confusion about AI
☐ Build in a low-stakes assignment where students reflect on their AI use
☐ Normalize questions: "Come talk to me if you're unsure about a tool"
☐Acknowledge that you're figuring this out too
☐ Update your policy based on conversations with students

One concrete way I'll invite ongoing conversation about AI:

_____

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....

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AS STUDENTS, WE CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POLICIES DESIGNED TO CATCH CHEATERS → ADVERSARIAL RELATIONSHIP, DECREASED HELP-SEEKING, ASSUMES GUILT AND POLICIES DESIGNED TO SUPPORT LEARNERS → PARTNERSHIP, NORMALIZES QUESTIONS, FOCUSES ON GROWTH.

WE HOPE YOU CAN CREATE SPACES FOR CONVERSATIONS ABOUT AI THAT BUILD TRUST. WE KNOW THERE ARE SO MANY QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EDUCATION, AND WE WANT TO BE PART OF ANSWERING IT WITH YOU.

SECTION 3: BUILDING TRUST IN REAL TIME

YOU'VE AUDITED YOUR SYLLABUS. YOU'VE REFRAMED YOUR AI POLICY. NOW COMES THE HARDER PART: MAKING SURE YOUR DAILY ACTIONS MATCH THE CARE YOUR DOCUMENTS PROMISE.

AS STUDENTS WE CAN TELL WHEN CARE IS PERFORMATIVE. WE NOTICE INCONSISTENCIES. WE REMEMBER SMALL MOMENTS OF BEING SEEN, AS WELL AS SMALL MOMENTS OF BEING DISMISSED.

THIS SECTION IS ABOUT CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT YOU SAY YOU VALUE AND WHAT STUDENTS ACTUALLY EXPERIENCE IN YOUR CLASSROOM.

ACTIVITY 1: THE "MANDATORY CARE" AUDIT

Time needed: 5 minutes

Multiple students across departments reported professors saying: "We're required to ask you how you are."
The impact: Students immediately knew it wasn't genuine, and it completely undermined trust.
The lesson: Mandatory care isn't care. If you're going to ask, mean it. If you can't mean it (we're all exhausted sometimes), find other ways to show you see students as people.

Reflect Honestly:
Do you currently do any of these "check-ins" because you're supposed to?
☐ Asking "how are you?" without really wanting to know
☐ Using check-in tools/apps because your department requires it
☐ Starting class with wellness questions that feel scripted
☐ Other: _____

Be honest with yourself: When you do these things, are you genuinely present, or going through motions?

Time needed: 10 minutes

Instead of mandatory check-ins that feel fake, try actions that feel real.

Review these alternatives and circle 3-5 you're genuinely willing to do:

Seeing Students as Individuals

- Learn and use students' names (even in large classes—learn a few each week)
- Reference something specific from their work: "I noticed in your last paper that you're interested in..."
- Remember things students share with you (take notes if needed)
- Follow up on conversations: "Last week you mentioned you were struggling with X—how's that going?"
- Acknowledge students in the hallway or around campus

Inviting Real Connection

- Ask questions that invite real answers: "What's something you're curious about related to this topic?"
- Share your own learning journey and struggles: "When I was in grad school, I also found this concept confusing. Here's what helped me..."
- Be transparent about your own limits: "I'm going to level with you, I'm exhausted today, but I'm here and I care about your learning"
- Create space for informal conversation before/after class
- Invite students to suggest topics or readings
- Show genuine curiosity about their perspectives

Creating Safety to Struggle

- Normalize not knowing: "This is hard. It's supposed to be hard."
- Share your own mistakes or confusion
- Celebrate questions, especially "confused" questions
- Make it clear that asking for help is a sign of engagement, not weakness
- Respond to emails warmly, especially when students are vulnerable

Now choose your top 3 and make them specific:

_____

....

THE BIGGEST INSIGHTS I'M TAKING FROM THIS WORKBOOK:

Share here what the concrete changes are that you are hoping to make in your classrooms following this time with us

THANK YOU

We are so honored to have shared this time with you.

Thank you for taking student voices seriously. Thank you for being in the room. Thank you for doing the work of building trust even when you're tired, under-resourced, and overwhelmed.

If you're interested in thinking together about these issues or want to share what you're trying in your classroom, reach out:

PASSJOHNJAY.COM